

CONNECT TRANSIT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
September 21, 2013

A Strategic Planning Session of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held at the Eastland Suites Hotel Conference Room #3, 1801 Eastland Drive, Bloomington, Illinois on September 21, 2013 at 8am.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Judy Buchanan, Chairman
Bill Wilson, Vice Chairman
Mike McCurdy, Secretary
John Bowman
John Thomas
Ryan Whitehouse

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Felicia Shaw

STAFF PRESENT: Andrew Johnson, General Manager
Jenifer Clark, Human Resources Director
Tom Crouch, Assistant Maintenance Director
Patrick Kuebrich, Finance Director
Roy Rickert, Transit Operations Director
Isaac Thorne, Procurement Director
David White, Safety & Training Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Dave Goranson, Goranson Consulting
Kay Titchenal, Goranson Consulting

Board Chair Judy Buchanan opened the session by thanking everyone for attending the session. She said that the transit system has a rich history in the community and she was proud to be a part of it. She mentioned that Ryan Whitehouse would be arriving late and that Felicia Shaw was unable to attend due to a family emergency. She then asked General Manager Andrew Johnson to introduce the facilitators.

Mr. Johnson introduced Dave Goranson and Kay Titchenal. Mr. Johnson informed the Trustees that the staff members had a meeting earlier in the week to get warmed up for the strategic planning process. He said that only he and one other member of the staff has been through a strategic planning process and it is new to everyone else. The meeting also provided the consultants with background on the transit system. Mr. Johnson said that he stressed to staff that they were at the table for a reason and they had an equal voice in the process. He said that he wanted this strategic plan to be realistic and useful. He then turned it over to Ms. Titchenal.

Ms. Titchenal thanked everyone for being there and asked that everyone introduce themselves. After introductions, Ms. Titchenal said that this would be different from typical strategic planning sessions and would be an interactive/participative process. She said that transit is constrained by a number of things, but within those constraints a lot of good things can be done.

Ms. Titchenal asked how many people attending had participated in a strategic planning process before. She stated that more of the trustees have been through the process than staff. Mike McCurdy said that this was the right time to act on the opportunity and go through this process. Ms. Titchenal agreed. She said that Connect Transit is 40 years old and has reinvented itself. She said that a lot of businesses that mature stagnate but the Trustees were smart enough to look into the future and look at the system differently. She provided a review of how strategic planning has evolved over the last 50 years. She said the typical process utilized SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. She said that in the late 1990s, the SWOT method and its goal setting was questioned. A new process was devised called SOAR – Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results. This is the process Connect Transit will be using.

Ms. Titchenal said that the group will start with a mission and vision statement. She asked if anyone knew the current mission and vision for the transit system. After the question was answered, she provided examples of missions and visions from two companies outside the transit industry – Google and Harley-Davidson. After explaining the examples, she split the attendees into groups and gave them 12 minutes to create vision and mission statements.

When the groups had completed their tasks, Ms. Titchenal asked to hear the results. Mr. McCurdy said his group came up with a vision of “moving the community forward through public transportation options and solutions.” John Thomas said his group came up with a vision of “provide transportation freedom.” John Bowman said his group came up with a vision of “providing safe, reliable transportation to the community.” Ms. Buchanan said her group came up with a vision of “a public transit system to move the community and people in an efficient, comfortable and accessible way.”

Ms. Buchanan said that her group came up with a mission of “engage riders, maximize ridership and be ever-mindful of good customer service.” Mr. Bowman said that his group came up with a mission of “become a relevant, effective transportation choice for the community.” Roy Rickert said his group came up with a mission of “provide safe, courteous, reliable service to our customers and the community.” Ms. Titchenal then stated that the group would take a break.

Upon resuming the session, Ms. Titchenal said that there are many different types of transportation and we need to define who we are. Mr. Bowman said that it starts with community. He then provided a history of public transportation in Bloomington-Normal dating back to 1867. Ms. Titchenal asked what happened when the transit system became Connect Transit. Mr. Bowman said he felt the rebranding was the result of a stale image. Mr. McCurdy said the transit system was invisible. Ms. Buchanan said that the logo was the image of a bus driver. Mr. Thomas said that the system was overly formal and the

rebranding was a way to brighten it up and make it more accessible to people psychologically. Ms. Buchanan said that now people mention the buses to her and ask if all the buses are new. Mr. McCurdy said that they were not noticed before. Ms. Buchanan said that we have a recognition and a presence now and we wanted to jumpstart something that we had that wasn't going anywhere. Mr. Johnson said that we wanted to find a name that better embodied what we do. He said that if you listen to conversations at the local, state and national level you will hear talk of connectivity. He said the transit system connects Bloomington and Normal and people in Bloomington-Normal. Ryan Whitehouse said that he thought Mr. Johnson was right and that on a larger scale we connect people with the rest of the country through the Normal multimodal center. Mr. Johnson said that, with the exception of a small paratransit system in Texas, we are the only ones in public transportation in this country using the name Connect.

Ms. Titchenal said that she watched the Connect Transit buses and saw clean buses and courteous drivers. She said that the previous discussion was what we should have done in the earlier task. We need to determine why we do what we do. She stated that the attendees talked about "public", "community" and "transportation multiple times. She discussed the idea of Connect Transit being the transportation choice. She asked how attendees see themselves. She then directed the attendees to go back and revisit the vision and mission. She directed the individual groups to create new vision statements.

Ms. Titchenal asked for the new statements. Ms. Buchanan said her group came up with a vision of "to be a reliable, engaging transit option that provides community connections." Mr. Bowman said his group came up with a vision of "to become an increasingly valuable community asset, providing connection options for the Bloomington-Normal community and surrounding areas." Mr. Thomas said his group came up with a vision of "providing the freedom for people to connect with each other and the community." Mr. Johnson said his group came up with a vision of "public transportation that connects the community to economic development opportunities as an integral part of the lives of the citizens." Ms. Titchenal then said we would move on to discussing strengths.

Ms. Titchenal asked for the attendees to brainstorm on strengths – everything that the transit system is doing really well. Strengths that were brought up were the transit system currently being fiscally sound, the transit facilities are in good shape and scalable for growth, community support, strong relationship with local higher education institutions, strong ridership, low fares, strong political support in Bloomington-Normal, a positively engaged board, a dedicated and loyal staff, improved technology, engagement with the business community, buses that are comfortable, transit's use of Uptown Station in Normal, the route restructuring and the new community involvement process that was created to accomplish the restructuring, good relations with the media, an engaged ridership base, providing reliable and dependable bus service, management vision in asset management and funding, strong general manager with a transit background, strong fiscal management, increased customer focus, transit system is flexible to customer needs and the transit system is safe.

Ms. Titchenal asked if the attendees saw opportunities in the strengths that were discussed. Ms. Buchanan asked if we had discussed the building of the management team and infrastructure. Mr. Johnson asked that the two newest directors to discuss their view of transit system strengths from the perspective of a newcomer. Patrick Kuebrich said that the rest of the management staff had a lot of knowledge of the transit system and provided that knowledge to him when he needed it. He said that the management team was cohesive and collaborative. Jenifer Clark agreed with Mr. Kuebrich's assessment and added that the other managers were very open to her ideas and her perspective. Ms. Titchenal stated that her understanding was that the other managers who have been with the transit system for a while were placed in their current roles recently. She said that other organizations had an inner management group that one had to earn their way into. She said that she was impressed with how well the team worked with each other, given how short a period of time they had been together. Mr. Thomas said that the way she described other organizations was how the transit system was about 4 years ago and it was a very different culture. Ms. Titchenal called a break.

Upon resumption of the session, Ms. Titchenal said that we will go back next time and refine the list of strengths. She said that now was the time to look at the trends affecting the transit system. Mr. Thomas stated that funding was looking like it would be a question mark for the system in the future. Ms. Titchenal said that this was an example of something that needed to be looked at not as a threat but as an opportunity. Ms. Buchanan said that we needed to look at being a transit system versus being a transit authority. Mr. Thomas said that stabilization of funding need to be a top priority. Mr. Johnson said that transit systems always will have some sort of funding problem but there is also always money available somewhere. He said that the progressive systems have the organizational infrastructure and internal capability to capitalize on the funding opportunities that are available and they will succeed. He said that transit systems that do not have that capability can get into trouble. He said that the Bloomington-Normal community is set up well for public transportation in terms of size and population density.

Ms. Titchenal said that this part of the process is taking threats and redefining them as opportunities. Ms. Buchanan said that the transit system transfer points can be improved. Mr. Whitehouse said that image is an opportunity. He said that there is a misconception on transit safety. Mr. Bowman said that there are misconceptions about people who ride the bus - that they don't have cars or that they received a DUI. David White said that he didn't think that there was a perception issue on the safety of the bus itself because people are usually impressed that in an accident the bus is generally doesn't suffer the same level of damage as a car. He said that it is the perception of public transportation and how it looks that is a problem. Mr. Johnson agreed and said that there are people who don't necessarily feel comfortable being around people that are different from them. Mr. McCurdy and Mr. Whitehouse discussed the redevelopment plan for downtown Bloomington. Ms. Titchenal recapped the opportunities that had been discussed. Mr. Bowman added that State Farm has plans in the community but will not likely share those plans with the average person. He said that the transit system needs to be plugged in in a different capacity in the business community. He said the transit system needs to have actionable operational intelligence on the business community. There was discussion of the lack of information available on the

Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau websites about the transit system.

Mr. McCurdy said that he was concerned that the Board was talking too much and wanted to know if the staff had more to say. Tom Crouch said that the transit system is exploring alternative fuel vehicles and it was an opportunity. Mr. Johnson said that another trend is increased regulation, especially at the federal level. He said that the transit systems that have their act together and can meet the new regulations will have an easier time obtaining funding and that is an opportunity. Ms. Clark said that the transit system has an aging labor force and it is difficult to recruit new employees. Mr. Bowman said that as the population ages, many more people will be losing their ability to drive. Mr. Johnson added that younger people are not getting their drivers licenses as quickly or not at all and want to live where there is public transportation. Ms. Buchanan asked if it was difficult to recruit drivers. Ms. Clark said that it was and explained how new bus drivers have to start as part time and have uncertain hours, which can make it challenging to find qualified people. Mr. McCurdy said that there were promotional opportunities for the transit system like the Light the Night event where the community can get more comfortable with the transit system.

Ms. Titchenal summarized the session. She said that the group would be coming back to the vision and mission statements in the next session. She said that the group would be taking up aspirations for the transit system in a future session and then the group would define the strategies to reach those aspirations. She thanked everyone for participating.